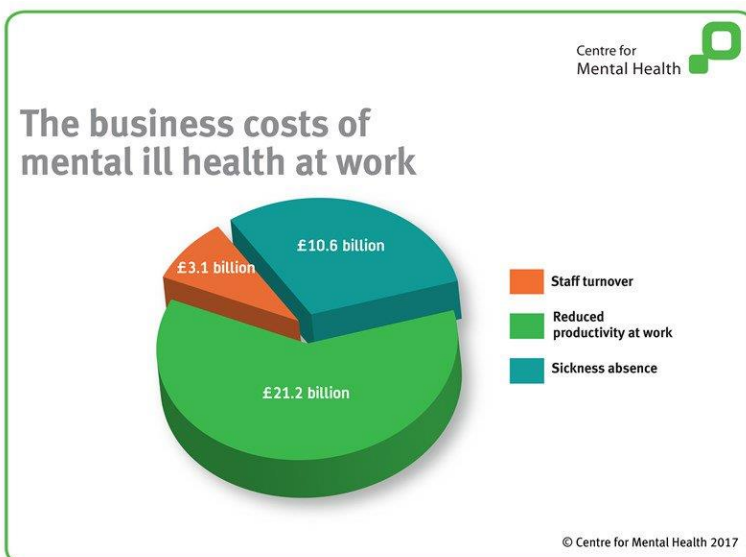


Implementing the HSE Management Standards



Stress is now replaced musculoskeletal issues as biggest cause of working days lost, reflecting the changing nature of the work that we do. The cost estimates for stress also account for lost productivity when people are in work but are suffering from the effects of stress that are diminishing their output - Presenteeism. Some surveys talk about as much as 57% of lost working days being caused by stress. The HSE suggest work-related stress, depression and anxiety account for 44% of work-related illnesses and the average number of days lost per case is 25.8 days.

On 28 May 2019, the World Health Organisation announced that it would be recognising “burn out” as a chronic condition on its International Classification of Diseases list from 2020. It classifies burn out as a “syndrome resulting from chronic workplace stress that has not been successfully managed”. It lists three characteristics:

- Feeling of energy depletion or exhaustion;
- Increased mental distance from one’s job or feelings of negativity or cynicism relating to one’s job; and
- Reduced professional efficacy.

Essentially stress has become normalised as 'what is to be expected' in many jobs, inevitable and something we all just have to put up with.

The HSE refer to stress as "an adverse reaction people have to excessive pressures or other types of demand placed on them".

Consider the causes of undue pressure in the workplace?

- Long working hours
- Over-stretching targets
- Lack of time to recharge
- Bursts of activity replaced by longer activity
- Poor communication
- Conflict
- Bullying and harassment

This is more likely to occur when changes happen, e.g. a new manager comes in with different expectations and places different demands on an employee so consider how change is managed in your organisation.

Management Standards

The HSE Management Standards isolate generic factors that are present in any job and contribute to stress. The six factors are:

- Demands of the job which is really about workload
- The control you have in the job
- Management support, which is about having the right encouragement and resources provided by the organisation, line management and colleagues.
- Relationships in the workplace which is largely about their manager
- The role - whether people understand their role and whether they are being put in a position of conflict by what they are being asked to do.
- Poorly managed change

Employers must take responsibility for the effects of the job on the individual and design jobs that aren't going to make people ill.

Managers are particularly vulnerable - surveys are finding that those trapped in the middle are being squeezed between the demands of senior leaders and those that they are managing.

Areas to focus on to provide solutions to mitigate the risk.

- Workload
- Competency
- Working patterns
- Physical environment
- Support

Along with standard risk assessments set up a consultation process with workers and gain commitment from senior management. Collect all the data and feedback and then devise a project plan and a communications and employee engagement strategy.

Ideally use mental health first aiders and set up a group to manage the process of identifying risks, assessing solutions and most importantly communicating with the business. Only once you've done this can you set up a stress, mental health and wellbeing policy that actually reflects what you are doing – not just one copied from the Internet!

Workplace stress and Health and Safety law

The Health and Safety at Work etc Act 1974 imposes a general duty on employers to ensure, so far as is reasonably practicable, the health, safety and welfare at work of all their employees. Do your current risk assessments adequately cover stress and pressure in the workplace?

Applying the principles of prevention. Where an employer implements any measures as the result of a risk assessment, the employer needs to apply the "principles of prevention" set out in Schedule 1 (regulation 4). Those relevant to stress are:

- avoiding risks;
- combating risks at source;
- developing a coherent overall prevention policy which covers technology, organisation of work, working conditions, social relationships and the influence of factors relating to the working environment; and
- Giving appropriate instructions to employees.

Can you set out what steps your organisation is taking to prevent harm from stress in the workplace? This may be something that in the future your insurance company is going to require.

Management Standards Approach

The Management Standards Approach looks at practical ways in which the standards can be achieved.

Demands

Demands covers issues such as workload, working patterns and the working environment. The HSE Management Standard is achieved when:

- Employees indicate that they are able to cope with the demands of their jobs.
- Systems are in place locally to respond to any individual concerns.

For this to happen:

- Employers should provide employees with adequate and achievable demands in relation to agreed hours of work.
- Skills and abilities should be matched to the job demands.
- Jobs should be designed to be within employees' capabilities.
- Employees' concerns about their work environment should be addressed.

Control

Control covers how much say a person has in the way they do their work. The HSE Management Standard is achieved when:

- Employees indicate that they are able to have a say about the way they do their work.
- Systems are in place locally to respond to any individual concerns.

For this to happen:

- Where possible, employees should have control over their place of work.
- Employees should be encouraged to use their skills and initiative to do their work.

Where possible, employees should be encouraged to develop new skills to help them undertake new and challenging pieces of work.

- The employer should encourage employees to develop their skills.
- Employees should have a say over when breaks can be taken.
- Employees should be consulted over their work patterns.

Support

Support concerns the encouragement, sponsorship and resources provided by the organisation, line management and colleagues. The HSE Management Standard is achieved when:

- Employees indicate that they receive adequate information and support from their colleagues and superiors.
- Systems are in place locally to respond to any individual concerns.

For this to happen:

- The employer needs to have policies and procedures to adequately support employees.
- Systems need to be in place to enable and encourage managers to support their staff.
- Systems need to be in place to enable and encourage employees to support their colleagues.
- Employees need to know what support is available and how and when to access it.
- Employees need to know how to access the required resources to do their job.
- Employees should receive regular and constructive feedback.

Relationships

Relationships includes promoting positive working to avoid conflict and dealing with unacceptable behaviour. The HSE Management Standard is achieved when:

- Employees indicate that they are not subjected to unacceptable behaviours, for example, bullying at work.
- Systems are in place locally to respond to any individual concerns.

For this to happen:

- The employer needs to promote positive behaviours at work to avoid conflict and ensure fairness.
- Employees need to share information relevant to their work.
- The employer needs to have policies and procedures in place to prevent or resolve unacceptable behaviour.
- The employer needs to have systems in place to enable and encourage employees to report unacceptable behaviour; and managers to deal with unacceptable behaviour.

Role

Role looks at whether people understand their role within the organisation and whether the organisation ensures that they do not have conflicting roles. The HSE Management Standard is achieved when:

- Employees indicate that they understand their role and responsibilities.
- Systems are in place locally to respond to any individual concerns.

For this to happen:

- The employer needs to ensure that, as far as possible, the different demands it makes of employees are compatible and that these are clear.
- The employer needs to provide information to enable employees to understand their role and responsibilities.
- The employer needs to have a system in place to enable employees to raise concerns about any uncertainties or conflicts they have in their role and responsibilities.

Change

Change concerns how organisational change (large or small) is managed and communicated in the organisation. The HSE Management Standard is achieved when:

- Employees indicate that the organisation engages them frequently when undergoing an organisational change.
- Systems are in place locally to respond to any individual concerns.

For this to happen:

- The employer needs to provide employees with timely information to enable them to understand the reasons for proposed changes.
- The employer needs to ensure adequate employee consultation on changes and provide opportunities for employees to influence proposals.
- Employees need to understand the probable impact of any changes to their jobs and, if necessary, be given training to support those changes.
- Employees need to be aware of timetables for changes and to be given access to relevant support during changes.

Overall Strategy

The organisation will need to identify the type of intervention required:

- primary interventions. These focus on addressing issues at source, preventing the problem from continuing and having an adverse effect on employee health. Primary interventions are the ideal type of intervention and are normally the most cost-effective;
- secondary interventions. These focus on helping employees deal with the situation (but do not address the underlying cause of the problem); and
- tertiary interventions. These are aimed at improving the health of employees who have been made ill by their work and if absent, help their return to work.

The level of the organisation at which the intervention will be aimed. This can be:

- strategic: where the issue is having a detrimental impact on the performance of employees across the organisation;
- macro: where an issue is affecting a particular team or group of employees; and
- micro: where an issue is affecting an individual and where interventions can be important as they demonstrate that the employer is listening to such concerns and is taking action to address them.

The time period over which action will be taken:

- action in the short term enables an intervention to be designed to give the employer the opportunity for a "quick win";
- action in the medium term will be required for an intervention to deliver results in months rather than days or weeks (in which case the employer should consider how employees will be kept informed of progress); and
- action in the long term will be required where an intervention will not deliver a positive outcome for a number of months or possibly years (in which case it will be important to consider how employees will be kept informed of progress).

An organisation should also provide details of all support services in place to tackle work-related stress or mental ill health. An employer should indicate how it will make internal support available whether by providing training and workshops on work-life balance and the avoidance of stress, facilitating mutual support groups (encouraging staff to informally support each other), appointing mental health champions and mental health first aiders or dedicating members of its HR department as points of contact. It should also state what, if any, external support is available such as EAPs or occupational health advisers.

We also recommend a company resource booklet which covers all aspects of support an individual may need including charities, helplines, websites, apps and practical help for stressful circumstances e.g. debt, housing.